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ABSTRACT

A self-inventory for school psychologists to become cognizant of their own understanding of and feelings about disenfranchised grief is presented. In death-related behavior, grief is socially constructed. There are social standards that apply to expressing grief; however, there are times when "grieving rules" may not coincide with the situation, attachments, sense of loss, or feelings of the survivors. In these cases grief may be hidden. Four categories of disenfranchised grievers (disenfranchised relationships, disenfranchised losses, unrecognized or disenfranchised grievers, death not socially sanctioned) are discussed. When a loss is ambiguous and cannot be openly mourned, grief is disenfranchised and mourning becomes complicated. A process model for grief and recovery is reviewed. Guidelines for school psychology practice are provided under the final topic, "What Can School Psychologists Do?" Appendix A gives instructions for use of the "Disenfranchised Grief Self Inventory" are given with discussion of debriefing for psychologists. Appendix B presents Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory as it is used to further support the school psychologist in reaching out to unsupported grievers. Appendix C is a list of resources for supporting grievers. (Contains 21 references.) (EMK)

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Linking Support Systems for Students and Families: Helping Disenfranchised Mourners Grieve a Death

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INTRODUCTION

> Contemporary American society is witnessing the increase in three types of death known to be at high risk for complicated mourning: (1) sudden and unanticipated deaths, especially if they are traumatic (i. e. characterized not only by suddenness and lack of anticipation, but violence, mutilation, and destruction; preventability and/or randomness; multiple death; or the mourner's personal encounter with death); (2) deaths that result from excessively lengthy chronic illnesses; and (3) deaths of children (Rando, 1998, p. 219).

In death-related behavior, grief is socially constructed. Each culture validates death in its own socially approved ways. According to Doka (1989), there are social scripts and social supports for the grievers in accordance with recognized cultural norms known as "grieving rules." These social standards "specify who, when, where, how, how long, and for whom people should grieve " (p.4). However, there are times when the "grieving rules" may not coincide "with the nature of attachments, the sense of loss, or the feelings of survivors." Consequently, "not all loss is openly acknowledged, socially sanctioned, and publicly shared. When grievers suffer a loss but have little or no opportunity to mourn publicly, disenfranchised grief occurs" (p. 4).

Unspoken grief can be social (interpersonal) or personal (intrapsychic). This paper will concentrate on intersocial rather than self-disenfranchised grief whose source is internal (within self) rather than external (societal). Suffice it to say that:

> "in self-disenfranchisement, the source of the shame and inhibition of the grief process is not in the actual views of others, but in the imagined views of others or the intrapsychic dynamics of the individual. The intrapsychic grief-inhibiting phenomenon is shame: in self-disenfranchised grief, one is disenfranchised by one's own shame (Kauffman, 1989, pp. 25-26).

On the other hand, the other kind of hidden grief is societal. A review of the literature reveals the following as some of the principal aspects of unsanctioned grief:

- deprivation of the opportunity to grieve publicly
- restrained, stifled, and frustrated emotions
- discounted, discouraged, and disallowed emotions
- absence of emotional and cultural supports
- silence caused by the hesitancy to express grief
- a possible social stigma attached to the death or relationship
- absence of mourning rituals
- a possible tenuous legal standing

FOUR CATEGORIES OF DISENFRANCHISED GRIEVERS

This school-psychologist-researcher reviewed all of the chapters in Doka's (1989) edited classic book as well as other sources and compiled the following lists of unrecognized grievers found to be common in each of four disenfranchised groups identified by Doka. The following listing is just a beginning, and school psychologists are encouraged to add other unacknowledged grievers:

1. The Relationship Is Not Recognized--Disenfranchised Relationships:

a. "Our society emphasizes kin-based relationships and roles. Disenfranchised grief may occur when attachments between the bereaved and the deceased are not based on recognizable kin ties. Examples of individuals who are expected to support the family in grief and who may not be allowed the full opportunity to grieve the loss" are as follows:

- lovers
- friends
- neighbors
- foster parents
- colleagues
- in-laws
- stepparents and stepchildren
- caregivers
- counselors-psychologists
- co-workers

- roommates (for example, in nursing homes)
- health care professionals
- lovers, former lovers, children, siblings, parents, medical staff, and friends of those in the gay community who care for and mourn the death of a gay AIDS patient

b. There are relationships that are not publicly recognized or socially sanctioned fully:

Illustrations include:

- nontraditional relationships such as extra marital affairs, heterosexual unmarried cohabitations, and gay and lesbian relationships

c. There are past relationships which are not considered to be grief-laden:

Examples include:

- ex-spouses
- past lovers
- former friends
- children and adults who never were acknowledged or seen by a parent--may mourn the loss of "what once was" and "what might have been"

2. **<u>The Loss Is Not Recognized--Disenfranchised Losses</u>:**

a. Others may not consider a loss as significant. Illustrations of such losses include:

- perinatal and neonatal deaths, stillbirths, spontaneous abortions, miscarriages, induced labors, and parents who are infertile who grieve the child who will never be born.
- elective abortions
- giving children up for adoption or foster care
- the loss of a companion pet
- marital separation and divorce including spouses, children, and relatives
- the breakup of a love relationship among adolescents and young adults
- prisoners
- criminals
- psychiatric patients
- job loss - unemployment
- being involved in an alternative family life style

b. The reality of the loss may not be socially validated. Illustrations include:

- social death-the person is alive but is treated as dead. This includes those who are institutionalized or comatose or those ostracized from a group
- psychological death-an individual lacks a consciousness of existence such as a person who is brain dead

- psychosocial death-the persona of someone has changed significantly, through mental illness, chronic brain syndromes such as Alzheimer's disease, or through significant personal transformation (such as through substance abuse, religious conversion or membership in a cult)

3. **The Griever Is Not Recognized--Disenfranchised Grievers:**

a. The person is wrongly looked upon as incapable of grief. Examples include:

- the very old
- the very young
- individuals with developmental disabilities such as mental retardation and pervasive developmental disorders
- unrecognized grief issues in midlife women
- adult children of dysfunctional families
- children who were neglected or abused in childhood

4. **The Death Is Not Socially Sanctioned--Disenfranchised Deaths:**

a. Although not listed as one of the three groups in Doka's schema but included in his 1989 book footnote is a fourth type involving "disenfranchising deaths." In these deaths, the cause creates shame and embarrassment that even those in recognized survivor roles (such as spouse, child, or parent) may be unwilling to seek social support for fear of stigma. Examples involving survivors include:

- deaths from AIDS
- certain situations surrounding suicide and homicide
- a death occurring in the act of a crime
- autoerotic asphyxia

AMBIGUOUS LOSS, DISENFRANCHISED GRIEF, AND COMPLICATED MOURNING

During a death, survivors feel confused and overwhelmed. It becomes even more complex when the death is an ambiguous loss:

> Ambiguous losses are those that lack clarity and can lead to sharply different assessments of exactly who or what has been lost. There may even be a question as to whether or not a loss has occurred. Uncertainty about how to respond, members of the social network do nothing. They may even avoid the bereaved because they (the network members) are

uncomfortable with the uncertainty (Gilbert, 1996, p. 3).

Since the ambiguous losses cannot be openly mourned or socially supported, they can lead to disenfranchised grief. Both are related and together compound the grief process which can result in the grievers becoming "at risk" for complicated mourning where "feelings of anger, guilt, or powerlessness are intensified" (Doka, 1989, p. 7). According to Rando (1998, 1993) who integrated Worden's (1982) four tasks of grieving (with the wording of the second and fourth tasks revised in 1991), complicated mourning is present when, after time, "there is a compromise, distortion, or failure of one or more of **the six 'R' processes of mourning**" in relation to the three phases of grief and mourning. This model (p. 217) is identified as follows:

A. Avoidance Phase

1. Recognize the loss
   a. Acknowledge the death
   b. Understand the death
2. React to the separation
   a. Experience the pain
   b. Feel, identify, accept, and give some form of expression to all the psychological reactions to the loss
   c. Identify and mourn secondary losses

B. Confrontation Phase

3. Recollect and re-experience the deceased and the relationship
   a. Review and remember realistically
   b. Revive and re-experience the feelings
4. Relinquish the old attachments to the deceased and the old assumptive world

C. Accommodation Phase

5. Readjust to move adaptively into the new world without forgetting the old
   a. Revise the old assumptive world

b. Develop a new relationship with the deceased

c. Adopt new ways of being in the world

d. Form a new identity

6. Reinvest in new attachments (people, objects, roles, hopes, beliefs, causes, and ideals)

Intervening in complicated mourning is very important. The earlier the better. If there is no effective intervention, unsupported grievers will continue to deny, repress, or avoid aspects of the loss and will continue to hold onto the loved one. Complicated grief can lead to any one of the following forms: mourning symptoms, mourning syndromes, a diagnosable mental or physical disorder, or death (Rando, 1998). School psychologists are in a good position to recognize the signs of complicated mourning and to intervene speedily.

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS' INTROSPECTIVE AND SELF-AWARENESS EXERCISE

In order to intervene socially with unacknowledged student and family complicated mourners, school psychologists need to be proactive. First, because interpersonal helping begins with self-awareness, they need to become cognizant of their own understanding of and feelings about disenfranchised grief. To guide school psychologists in their introspection, this school psychologist has created a Self-Inventory based on the four Disenfranchised Grief Lists already reported in this paper. School psychologists are encouraged to proceed to **Appendix A**, read it, and check off the different types of ignored grief that they have experienced either personally as individuals or professionally as school psychologists.

Secondly, after self-reflecting by taking a personal and professional inventory about what they experienced, school psychologists can identify how they felt at the time. Did they feel neglected? Did they feel unwanted? Did they feel shame? Did they hide their grief? When school psychologists provide direct services to others, they are survivors of

many losses. Yet, they become ignored grievers in their helping roles, and their grief can become disenfranchised. That is why it is important for school psychologists to be debriefed after intervening in school and community crises. The advent of critical incident stress debriefing is a step in that positive direction.

BRONFENBRENNER'S ECOLOGICAL THEORY

In addition to developing self-insight, school psychologists need to be aware and alert as well as **ready to reach out** to the unsupported grievers to link appropriate support systems to and for them. One way of reaching out to them is to integrate Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1994) ecological systems theory, a contextual approach. His phenomenological paradigm incorporates **Kurt Lewin's "classic equation: B=f(PE)**, behavior is a function of the interplay between person and environment, the environment as it is perceived rather than as it may exist in 'objective' reality" (1979, p. 4) By understanding Bronfenbrenner's five-level schema, school psychologists can enhance their knowledge and skills in helping the socially unestimated mourners (students and family members) to grieve with social support, acceptance, and validation. In addition, school psychologists can reach out beyond the school setting into a much wider social milieu to offer individual, group, and/or community interventions.

Bronfenbrenner studied the environment from the perspective of the developing person. He stated, "**The ecological environment** is conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the other" (1994, p. 1645). Moving from the innermost level to the outside, these structures are especially identified from the perspective of a student and are defined as described below as well as on the next two pages and also diagrammed in **Appendix B** of this paper. In order to obtain a visual image of his model, schools psychologists are encouraged to review the **Appendix B** diagram before proceeding to the explanations of each of Bronfenbrenner's systems which are explained below and on the next two pages. The following definitions are cited from his 1979 book with the exception of the chronosystem which is quoted from Papalia et al (1996):

Microsystem - "A place where people in their everyday environments can readily engage in face-to-face interaction--home, school, peer group, day care center, neighborhood, and workplace. The child spends a lot of time in different microsystems. Factors in the microsystem can enhance or interfere with a child's development" (p. 3). Consequently, to help the underestimated griever, school psychologists need to be aware of the child's immediate environmental context in order to recommend appropriate therapeutic linking services.

Mesosystem - "This comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (such as, for a child, the relations among home, school, and neighborhood peer group; for an adult the relations among family, work, and social life). It consists of a system of microsystems that interrelate with one another" (p. 25). Thus, school psychologists need to provide opportunities for positive interactions between home and school in order to connect suitable therapeutic services to the disenfranchised griever.

Exosystem - "One of more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by what happens in the setting containing the developing person. Examples in the case of a young child might include the relation between the home and the parent's workplace; or for a parent, the relation between the school and the neighborhood peer group" (p. 25). In helping the unrecognized griever, school psychologists need to be aware of the indirect influence of the parents' job on the child, of the amount of time it takes them away from their child, and of the stresses it causes in our already hurried and hyperactive society.

Macrosystem - "This refers to consistencies, in the form and content of lower-order systems (micro-, meso-, and exo-) that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole along with any belief systems of ideology underlying such consistencies. The macrosystem may be thought of as a societal blueprint for a particular culture or subculture" (p. 26). School psychologists need to be cognizant of the beliefs of

the culture (such as prejudice as well as the acceptance and depiction of violence on television) which can have a powerful effect on vulnerable children, including those who are the unspoken grievers.

Chronosystem - "This encompasses change or consistency over time not only in the characteristics of the person but also of the environment in which that person lives (e. g., changes over the life course in family structure, socioeconomic status, employment, place of residence, or the degree of hecticness and ability in everyday life)" (Papalia et al, p. 17). School psychologists need to understand the changes and consistencies within a child and in his or her environment in order to recommend suitable, contextual therapeutic services.

WHAT CAN SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS DO?

By examining Bronfenbrenner's model which extends far beyond the immediate situation affecting the developing person, school psychologists can go beyond the family and the school and study the social systems that affect a child, adolescent, or adult disenfranchised griever. In this way, they can **reach out** to the unacknowledged grievers and help them in a broader context. Some additional specific suggestions for helping the unrealized grievers are as follows:

- School psychologists need to recognize and validate the grievers' loss. Such recognition and validation will counter its social unrecognizability.
- School psychologists need to listen. This will permit opportunities to grievers to feel comfortable in expressing themselves fully which they were previously not allowed to do.
- School psychologists need to be genuinely understanding, empathetic, and sensitive to the disenfranchised grievers' loss.
- School psychologists need to provide opportunities for the inhibited grievers to express their feelings. This will allow the mourners a socially acceptable outlet for their emotions.

- School psychologists need to provide time to grieve and give the survivors permission to grieve.
- School psychologists need to provide opportunities for mourning rituals which are powerful social and cultural therapeutic tools for the resolution of grief.
- School psychologists need to design intervention strategies that will compensate for the absence of necessary social supports.
- School psychologists need to understand and use Rando's (1998; 1993) six "R" processes of mourning to assess and to intervene with the hidden griever.
- School psychologists need to realize that in their helping roles, they can also become disenfranchised grievers. Consequently, if they are to intervene successfully with others, they need to be aware of their own thoughts and feelings that may be socially unsupported and to be cognizant of ways of expressing them through some socially acceptable outlets.
- School psychologists need to link therapeutic services to students and families by becoming aware of and by using a broad contextual perspective, such as Bronfenbrenner's human ecological approach.
- School psychologists need to be aware of the national support services available in order to link disenfranchised grievers to them. **Appendix C** lists such resources.

The social aspect of grief which is therapeutic in itself cannot be underestimated. According to Deck & Folta (1989), to help the mourners who are experiencing incomplete grief work, school psychologists need to remember that "grief must be public to be shared and shared to be diminished" (p. 87).

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APPENDIX A

DISENFRANCHISED GRIEF SELF-INVENTORY

The inventory was prepared and devised by Dr. Michael R. Tramonte for the purpose of stimulating school psychologists at the NASP Orlando Conference to introspect about disenfranchised grief in their personal and professional lives.

Directions: Included are four columns: No, Yes, Personal, and Professional. Please check each type of hidden grief that you experienced personally and/or professionally in your relationships with others. First, check off "no" or "yes." If "no," continue to the next item. If "yes," check off "Per." for "Personal" and/or "Pro." for "Professional." When finished, review your personal and professional disenfranchised loss. What have your learned about yourself?

1. The Relationship Is Not Recognized--Disenfranchised Relationships:

   a. Certain individuals are expected to support the family in grief and are not allowed the full opportunity to grieve the loss.

   Illustrations include:

	No	Yes	Per	Pro
• lovers				
• friends				
• neighbors				
• foster parents				
• colleagues				
• in-laws				
• stepparents and stepchildren				
• caregivers				
• counselors-psychologists				
• co-workers				
• roommates (for example, in nursing homes)				
• health care professionals				
• lovers, former lovers, children, siblings, parents, medical staff, and friends of those in the gay community who care for and mourn the death of a gay AIDS patient				

No Yes Per Pro

b. There are relationships that are not publicly recognized or socially sanctioned fully:

Examples include:

- nontraditional relationships such as extra marital affairs, heterosexual unmarried cohabitations, and gay and lesbian relationships _____

c. There are past relationships which are not considered to be grief-laden:

Illustrations include:

- ex-spouses _____
- past lovers _____
- former friends _____
- children and adults who never were acknowledged or seen by a parent--may mourn the loss of "what once was" and "what might have been" _____

2. <u>The Loss Is Not Recognized</u>--<u>Disenfranchised Loss</u>:

a. Others may not consider a loss as significant. Examples include:

- perinatal and neonatal deaths, stillbirths, spontaneous abortions, miscarriages, induced labors, and parents who are infertile who grieve the child who will never be born _____
- elective abortions _____
- giving children up for adoption or foster care _____
- the loss of a companion pet _____
- marital separation and divorce including spouses, children, and relatives_____
- the breakup of a love relationship among adolescents and young adults _____
- prisoners _____
- psychiatric patients _____
- job loss - unemployment _____
- being involved in an alternative family life style _____

No Yes Per Pro

b. The reality of the loss may not be socially validated.

Illustrations include:

- social death-the person is alive but is treated as dead. This includes those who are institutionalized or comatose or those ostracized from a group _____
- psychological death-a person lacks a consciousness of existence--someone who is brain dead _____
- psychosocial death-the persona of someone has changed significantly, through mental illness, chronic brain syndrome such as Alzheimer's disease, or through significant personal transformation (such as through substance abuse, religious conversion, or membership in a cult) _____

3. The Griever Is Not Recognized--Disenfranchised Grievers:

a. The person is wrongly looked upon as incapable of grief.

Examples include:

- the very old _____
- the very young _____
- individuals with developmental disabilities such as mental retardation and pervasive developmental disorders _____
- unrecognized grief issues in midlife women _____
- adult children of dysfunctional families _____
- children who were neglected or abused in childhood _____

4. The Death Is Not Socially Sanctioned--Disenfranchised Deaths:

- deaths from AIDS _____
- certain situations surrounding suicide and homicide _____
- a death occurring in the act of a crime _____
- autoerotic asphyxia _____

APPENDIX B

BRONFENBRENNER'S ECOLOGICAL DIAGRAM

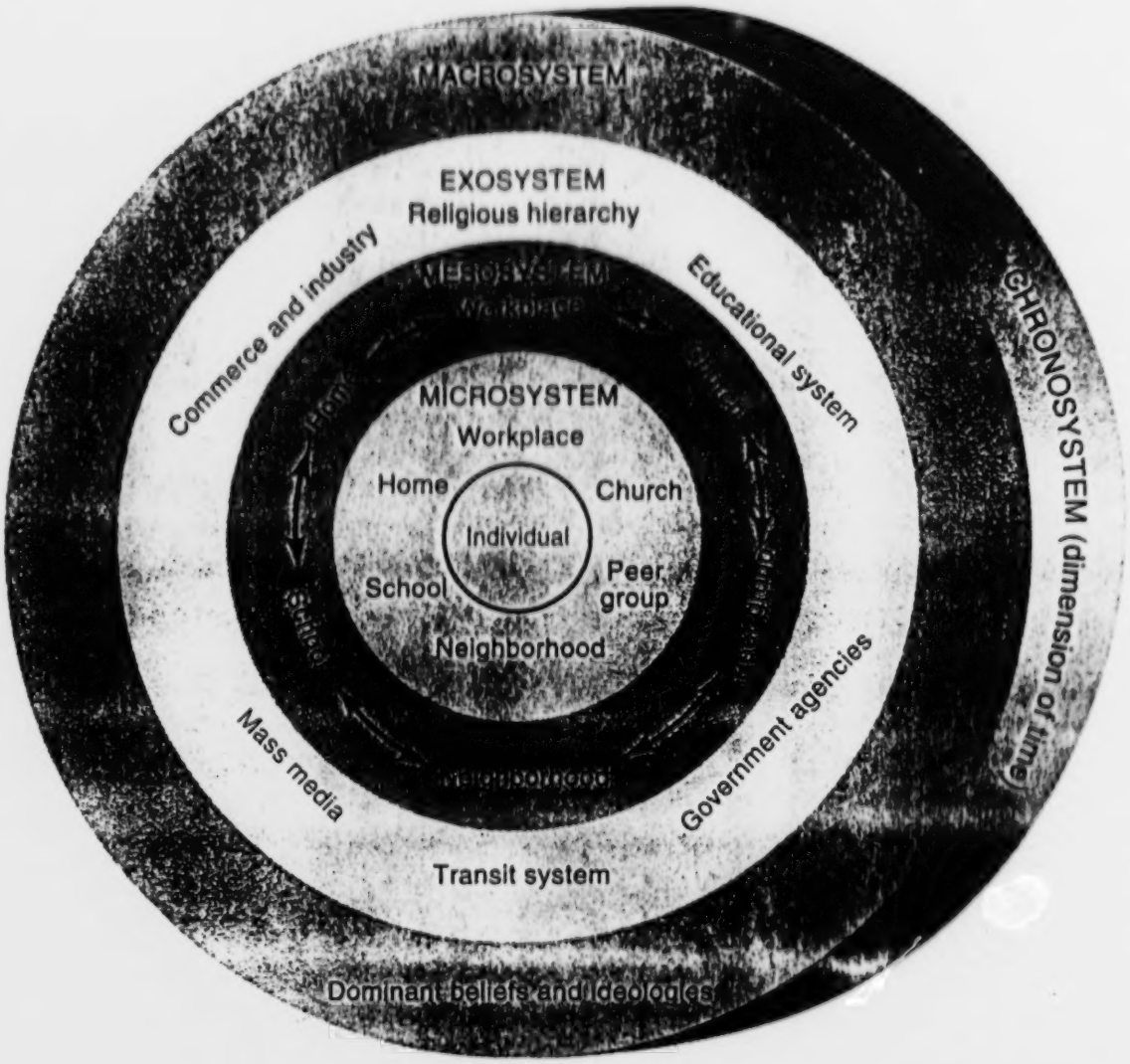

FIGURE 1-1

Ecological view of influences on development. Concentric circles indicate the most intimate environment (innermost area) to the broadest, all within the dimension of time.

(SOURCE: Adapted from Cole & Cole, 1989.) Permission to reproduce granted by W. H. Freeman Company Publishers.

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APPENDIX C

LINKING DISENFRANCHISED AND OTHER GRIEVERS

TO SUPPORT SYSTEMS

The following are resources to help school psychologists link unforgotten grievers to national support systems:

Candlelighter's Foundation
2025 Eye St. NW., Suite 1011, Washington, DC 20006
Helps parents of children with cancer

Children's Wish Foundation International
8615 Roswell Road, Atlanta, GA 30350-7526
(770) 393-WISH (9474) or (800) 323-WISH
The Foundation fulfills the favorite WISH of any child not expected to reach age 18.

Compassionate Friends
P.O. Box 3696, Oak Brook, IL 60522
(703) 990-0010, (312) 323-5010
Offers support to parents and siblings grieving the death of a child.

Heartbeat
2015 Devon St., Colorado Springs, CO 80909
(719) 596-2575
Mutual support group for those who have lost someone through suicide

In Loving Memory
1416 Green Run Lane, Reston, VA
(703) 435-0608
Mutual support and help for parents who lost their only child or all of their children

Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)
669 Airport Freeway, Suite 310, Hurst, TX 76053
(800) GET-MADD

Mothers of AIDS Patients (MAP)
P.O. Box 1763, Lomia, CA 09717

National Sudden Infant Death Syndrome Alliance
10500 Little Patuxent Partway #420, Columbia, MD 21044-3505
(410) 964-8000 or (800) 221-7437

National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA)
717 D. St. NW., Washington, DC 20004
(202) 232-6682

National Victim Center
307 West 7th, Ste. 1001, Ft. Worth, TX 76102
(800) FYI-CALL

Parents of Murdered Children (POMC)
100 East Eighth Street, Room B-41, Cincinnati, OH 45202
(513) 721-5683

Ray of Hope for Suicide Survivors
(319) 337-9880

Survivors
993 "C" Santa Fe Ave., Vista, CA 92083
Mutual support to help grievers of a loved one recover

Tender Hearts/Triplet Connection
P.O. Box 99571, Stockton, CA 95209
(209) 474-0885

They Help Each Other Spiritually (Theos)
Theos Foundation
410 Penn Hills Mall, Pittsburgh, PA 15235
(412) 243-4299
Helps persons whose spouses have died

Unite, Inc.
Jeanes Hospital
7600 Central Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19111
(215) 728-3777
Support for parents grieving miscarriage, stillbirth, and infant death